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Press Release

Immediate Release

Topic: September Marks Sickle Cell Disease Awareness Month
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Healthy parents who seek help to find genetic clues can prevent or reduce complications from an inherited blood disease in their children. That's why Mississippi's public health experts encourage area residents to seize various learning opportunities about the inherited blood disease during September, Sickle Cell Disease Awareness month.

"Objectives in reducing disease complications through parent education and preventive measures include events such as free Sickle Cell testing and health fair target sites during the month of September," said West Central Public Health District Officer Dr. Robert Hotchkiss.

Three health fair sites will offer free Sickle Cell testing and childhood immunizations from 10 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.:

Madison County Health Department – September 8
317 North Union Street, Canton

Hinds County Health Department – September 20,
Jackson Medical Mall, 350 W. Woodrow Wilson, Jackson

Yazoo County Health Department -- September 28
230 E. Broadway Street, Yazoo City

Other activities include free Sickle Cell testing at health departments in Copiah, Claiborne, Hinds, Issaquena, Madison, Rankin, Simpson, Sharkey, Warren, and Yazoo during September; a blood drive at Tougaloo College on September 27, and Zoo Day on September 30.

"The opportunities presented to area residents will provide a clue to a medical history that can predict whether someone's future children can be born with a form of Sickle Cell Disease," said Child Health Program Director Danny Bender.

Sickle Cell Disease is a group of related disorders that affect red blood cells, which form the shape of crescents or sickles. The changes of shape can cause numerous medical problems such as infections, anemia, organ damage, pain, and complication during pregnancy for women, hand and foot syndrome, leg ulcers, and

jaundice.

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Sickle Cell Disease – Add 1

“The blood disease can be detected with a blood test called hemoglobin electrophoresis,” said Genetics Nurse Coordinator Cynthia Cline. “The test is simple. A small blood sample is taken; infants who test positive are usually retested to confirm results. Early treatment is key; infants who test positive may be started on medication right away to fight – or prevent – infections caused by the disease.”

Cline continued, “The entire family can benefit from testing because Sickle Cell Disease screening for newborns provides an opportunity to identify other family members who may carry the Sickle Cell trait, but might not know that they do. Newborn screening helps assure early discovery of health problems, so that health care providers and parents can take appropriate steps toward each baby’s best health status.”

Sickle Cell Disease has no cure – treatment depends on the patient’s specific symptoms. Treatments include blood transfusions, bone marrow transplants, regular medical examinations, fever reducing and pain medication drugs, bed rest, and avoidance of high altitudes.

Becoming a blood donor will help ease the pain many Sickle Cell patients suffer. Dani Edmonson with Mississippi Blood Services emphasizes the importance of becoming a blood donor: “Because of genetic similarities, more African-Americans are urged to donate blood to be transfused to Sickle Cell patients. Fewer than two percent of Mississippian blood donors are African-Americans.”

According to Hotchkiss, Sickle Cell Disease can be prevented only in future generations through genetic counseling. Those diagnosed as having Sickle Cell Disease or carrying the Sickle Cell trait should seek genetic counseling to make wise decisions about marriage and having children.

Mississippi began Sickle Cell Disease screening in 1989, with an average of 72 cases of Sickle Cell Disease diagnosed per year and 3,500 Sickle Cell traits diagnosed. In the United States, over 2 million people have the Sickle Cell trait and more than 50,000 Americans have Sickle Cell Disease.

“We seek to control Sickle Cell Disease through diagnostic screening methods and genetic counseling at the community level,” said Hotchkiss. “During September, we plan to promote services and agencies available to Sickle Cell patients, to encourage health care compliance, and decrease the mortality of Sickle Cell patients.”

The public can call 1-800-451-3903 for more information about the Mississippi Department of Health’s Genetic Program. To learn more about becoming a blood donor, area residents may call Mississippi Blood Services at 1-800-817-7449.

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